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Globalizing Social Activism: Sustainable Development in Urban Areas

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The Pennsylvania Avenue Initiative Proposal: Public Fitness Equipment

A recent study completed by the American College of Sports Medicine released this year named the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria metropolitan area as the most fit city in the United States, giving it a score of 77.3 out of 100.¹ Some of the factors that contributed to this high ranking include low death rates from cardiovascular disease and diabetes as well as increased use of biking and walking as modes of transportation. This is indicative of the importance of health consciousness to a significant portion of the Washington, D.C., population. For this reason, I'm confident that the installation of public fitness equipment is a move that would be both enjoyed and appreciated by D.C. residents.

The inspiration for this project came to me before I even arrived on Pennsylvania Avenue. After leaving my residence hall one afternoon to walk downtown and examine the street, I noticed the prevalence of runners, bikers and citizens wearing activewear indicative of a recent or upcoming workout. While D.C. has certainly garnered a name for itself in regard to fitness, I noticed a significant drop off in runners and walkers as I neared Pennsylvania Avenue. I inferred that this may be as a result of the atmosphere along the avenue — businesslike, professional, *federal*. The street is lined with buildings that host the offices of some of the most important federal employees in the city, and while the work day wears on, very few folks can be seen walking the streets — much less running them.

It's not for lack of trying that this persists. When the District of Columbia opened bike lanes along the avenue in 2010, it was clear that cutting down on city traffic was a priority. U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood told the Washington Post, "Bike paths like this one — which will provide cyclists with access to the most historic corridor in Washington, D.C. — are

¹ http://americanfitnessindex.org/docs/reports/acsm_2014AFI_report_final.pdf

part of a cleaner, greener future in American transportation.”² Along with the traffic adjustments, cyclists were now able to take advantage of the street — and its breathtaking view of the Capitol — while maintaining a fit and active lifestyle. I am of the opinion that runners should have this same opportunity. One way that Pennsylvania Avenue can encourage runners and walkers to visit is to install exercise equipment built for parks along the avenue’s many tiny green spaces and wide sidewalks.

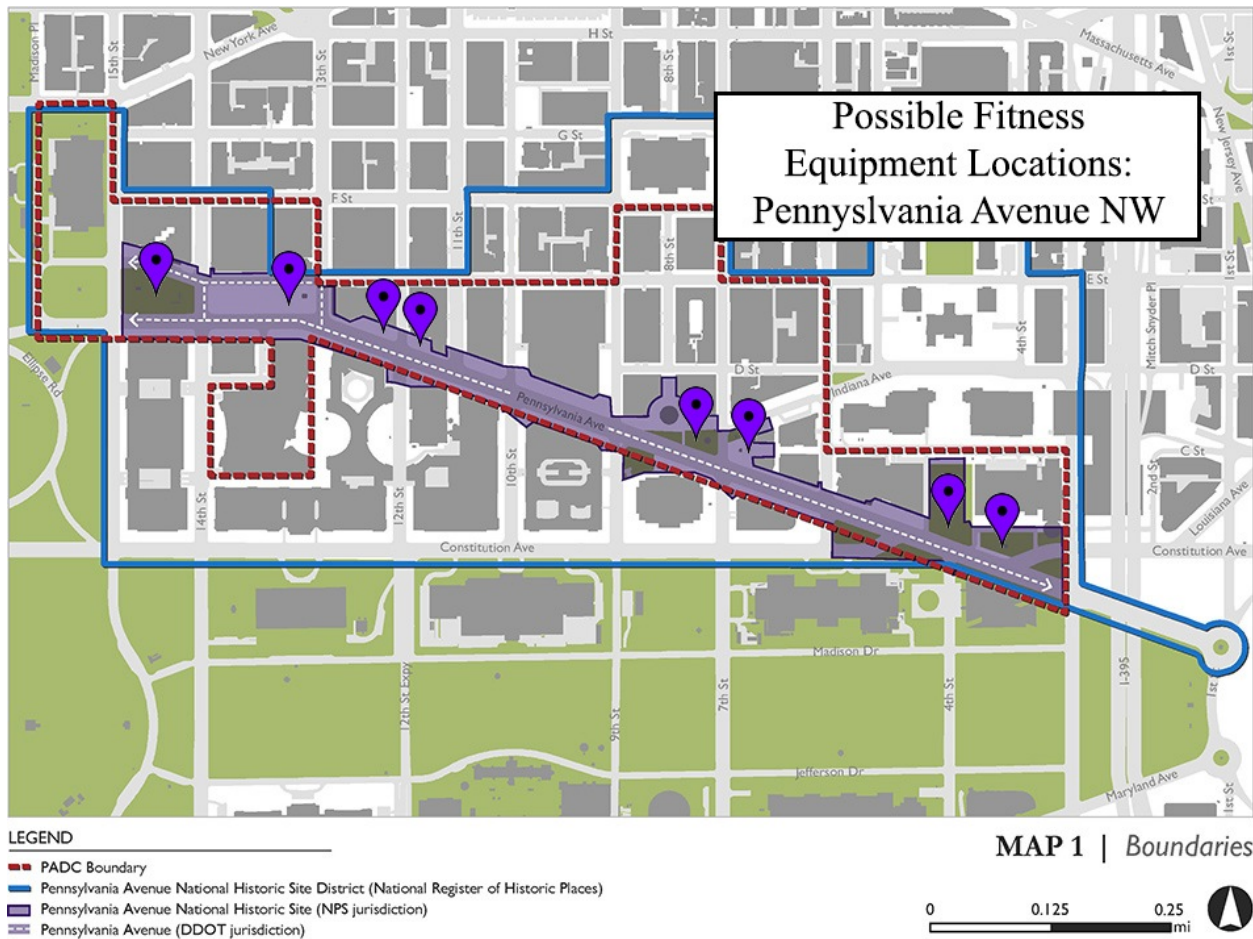


I was first introduced to such fitness stations in Twin Lakes Park, a small county park south of Pittsburgh, Pa. Here the equipment lined the park’s running trail, giving visitors the chance to exercise certain muscle groups along their run or stretch between laps. An example of the equipment is shown below, a product of Greenfields Outdoor Fitness, which manufactures equipment for recreational facilities across the country.³ The equipment is sold in shades of forest green and beige, making it aesthetically pleasing while

avoiding becoming a distraction. Most pieces of equipment are also well contained, and as a result will take up very little space. However, perhaps the most important aspect is that they serve as a social catalyst. Some pieces, like the pendulum shown above, require the work of several people to operate. This is a brilliant way to encourage group fitness and socialization amongst runners and walkers on Pennsylvania Avenue. If a community of fitness-oriented D.C. citizens catch wind of something like this, I’m sure that the avenue would become a popular route. This could lead to additional commerce along the street and would create the all-important sense of community that urban dwellers crave.

² <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/22/AR2010062204922.html>

³ http://www.gfoutdoorfitness.com/images/stories/SamplePDFS/Small_Sample_Package.pdf



I have appropriated the map of Pennsylvania Avenue provided on the Pennsylvania Avenue Initiative's website and made a few suggestions as to where equipment could be installed along the street. The purple pins represent locations where I noticed either an excess of unused green space, nearly empty plazas or wide sidewalks with very little foot traffic. These include Freedom Plaza, Pershing Park, the U.S. Navy Memorial Plaza, and John Marshall Place Park just to name a few. These spots are ideal installation sites because they are set back far enough from the street to ensure user safety and they offer plenty of space so as to not disrupt the flow of foot traffic.

Pennsylvania Avenue is a golden opportunity to create space for the city's fit citizens while generally driving more people downtown. Installing this fitness equipment would be the first step in creating a health-conscious, eco-friendly micro neighborhood to which the rest of the nation can look when designing its recreational spaces and infrastructure.